

Design Narrative

172 Woburn Street in Reading will be the renovation of an existing, three-story building originally built as a parochial school, and more recently as a gymnastics and dance academy. The proposed, renovated building will contain a total of 20 one-, two- and three-bedroom units.

The original structure, built around 1950, has a brick exterior over a concrete foundation, wood-sheathed pediment at each end and a sloped, asphalt shingle roof with an ornamental cupola in the center. The site has a moderate contour, sloping from Woburn Street on the north side, to a large, level parking located to the south of the building. Driveways run along the length of the building on the east and west sides.

St. Agnes Catholic Church shares the subject site's west lot line. The remainder of the surrounding neighborhood is residential, consisting mainly of single family houses.

The property is located within two blocks of the MBTA train line and bus depot, and is convenient to downtown Reading for shopping, meals and entertainment.

The subject building does not match the scale of the adjacent residential structures, though it does serve as a buffer at the east side of St. Agnes church, which appears unusually large due to its location at the top of a rise, emphasized by the height of its main façade and tower, and also by its setback and terraced entry. The house located on the east side of the site is a 2-story Victorian whose height appears reduced due to the second story mansard roof at the front.

The subject building, as it currently exists, suffers from some architectural issues: the existing street (north) façade is mostly featureless, having a plain entry and few windows/large expanses of brick that give the impression that the building has turned its back on the street; the wood-sheathed pediment above the street façade is imposing and non-descript in its scale; the long side elevations have a mixture of smaller windows on the lower floors, which make the building seem longer due to the large expanses of brick surrounding the windows.

The proposed work will help to rectify noted issues:

- The street façade will be modified to appear more of an entry. A new wood-framed entry portico with detailed columns will take the place of the existing, helping to emphasize the nature of the entry; it is not intended to appear to be as a secondary entry to the building. A handicap ramp and landscaped areas on each side will complement the new entry.
- New windows will be installed in the existing brick, which will give the front façade a more residential image.
- The large wood pediment above the entry will be modified with vertical battens to help reduce the scale of the large expanse of wood.
- New windows will be installed on the east and west sides to give more rhythm to the lower floors, and help reduce the blank expanses of brick that surround the existing windows on the lower floors.